GNFAC Avalanche Forecast for Mon Mar 23, 2020

Good Morning. This is Alex Marienthal with the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Forecast on Monday, March 23rd at 7:00 a.m. Today's forecast is sponsored by **Yellowstone Club Community Foundation** and **Yellowstone Artic Yamaha**.

Bridger parking lots are private property. Please do not loiter, camp overnight or congregate in the parking lots. Skin, ski, leave. The lots will be closed if people do not respect this request. Ski areas are closed and backcountry conditions exist. There is no avalanche control or ski patrol services (**video**).

Social Distancing in the Backcountry

The last couple days I went for short walks to breathe fresh air. I kept an eye and ear out for other people, chose less popular areas, kept my dog on a leash anytime other people were close by, and greeted passing groups from the opposite side or off the trail. This has nothing to do with avoiding avalanches. These are challenging times and we hope all can enjoy the mountains to ease the stress, but the COVID-19 virus needs to be taken seriously (**Video from county health department**).

It is important we all do our part to reduce the spread and be diligent with social distancing in parking lots and along trails. Please do not carpool with people outside your household, keep groups small, and don't have social gatherings in the parking lot (with dogs as well). Be patient and courteous. Step aside for other groups to pass. Make eye contact, smile, say hi and communicate, "go ahead" and "thank you".

Dial back your expectations and objectives to minimize the risk of injury and overtaxing local EMS services. All day hot-lapping or a car shuttle traverse with a group of friends are not great choices. Accept that an hour or two of fresh air is sufficient therapy. Stay home as much as possible. Wash your hands. Disinfect door handles and gas pumps. Stay out of other towns. Plan ahead to minimize contact with 'touch-surfaces' and other people. Send us social distancing tips and photos and we will share to help each other figure this out and stay safe.

Mountain Weather

Yesterday morning the mountains got 1-2" of snow. Wind has been west-southwest at 15-30 mph. This morning temperatures are teens to 20s F. Today, temperatures will reach high 20s to high 30s F with west-southwest wind increasing to 20-35 mph. Clouds will increase this afternoon and 1-2" of snow will fall overnight with light snowfall expected through Wednesday.

Snowpack and Avalanche Discussion

All Regions

Today the snowpack is generally stable, but travel in avalanche terrain always comes with risk. Although unlikely, there are three avalanche problems to keep in mind. Wet loose avalanches, isolated wind slabs, and weak sugary snow at the base of the snowpack.

Wet loose slides and wind slabs may be small, but have large consequences if they push you into terrain traps like trees or over cliffs. Avoid sunny slopes if the snow surface becomes wet, if you sink past your ankle in wet snow or see wet roller-balls on the surface. Where the snow surface is dry, carefully assess terrain for wind loading and consequences of even a small slide. A recent skier triggered wind slab near Big Sky shows the

potential type of hazard today (**photo and details**).

Avalanches on weak layers near the ground are unlikely, but have big consequences. On Friday two separate groups had close calls in the Absarokas (outside the advisory area) with large avalanches that broke deep in the snowpack. One was triggered by a cornice fall (**photos and details**), and the other on a slope with over a dozen previous tracks (**photos and details**). Dave skied in Taylor Fork and backed off a plan to ski steep terrain after he dug and found a poor snowpack structure (**video**). Probe and dig to look for weak sugary snow at the base of the snowpack before riding steep slopes, and keep an eye out for surface hoar buried about 8" deep (**photo**). Stay far back from the edge along ridgelines and minimize time on slopes with large cornices above.

Today the avalanche danger is rated LOW, but avalanches are not impossible. Continue to practice safe backcountry travel protocols and be diligent with snowpack and terrain assessment.

We will end daily avalanche forecasts on April 5th and continue with general bulletins every Monday and Friday through April. Over the next couple weeks we will take down weather stations and get little to no observations from guides and ski patrol. With more people in the backcountry and ski areas closed, we need help gathering field data. Please send us your observations no matter how brief. You can fill out an observation form, email us (mtavalanche@gmail.com), leave a VM at 406-587-6984, or Instagram (#gnfacobs).

Important Information About COVID-19

Latest news from state health officials:

New cases "indicated that there is evidence of community transmission in Gallatin County. Community transmission means the spread of an illness for which the source of infection is unknown or cannot be directly traced back to a known exposure."

Health Officer Matt Kelley: "We stress again that now is the time to take strong action, and this underlines the importance of the restrictions and closures GCCHD and the governor have put into place to limit the spread of this disease."

*We apologize for sharing a previous quote from local healthcare providers that had inaccurate information. The Gallatin County Health Dept. disagrees with a previously shared statement that "many people are being tested", due to test kit rationing.

Upcoming Avalanche Education and Events

The GNFAC and Friends avalanche education programs have been cancelled due to COVID-19. Thank you to all our amazing instructors for a great year of education!

Our education calendar lists awareness lectures and field courses offered by other providers: Events and Education Calendar.